

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-10

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FM AMEMBASSY QUITO

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5288

INFO DEA WASHDC

AMEMBASSY BOGOTA

AMEMBASSY CARACAS

AMEMBASSY LIMA

C O N F I D E N T I A L QUITO 2811

CARACAS PLEASE PASS DEA

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: SNAR, EC, PINT

SUBJ: GOE REACTION TO NYT SERIES ON DRUG TRAFFICKING

REF: A. STATE 91798; B. BOGOTA 3672 (NOTAL)

1. SUMMARY: GOE HAS REACTED FIRMLY TO CHARGES CONTAINED IN GAGE ARTICLE TO EFFECT THAT LAST DECEMBER GOE MINGOV POVEDA ORDERED CHARGES DROPPED AGAINST A DRUG TRAFFICKER. IN ADDITION TO USSUING PUBLIC DENIAL, POVEDA ADDRESSED GAGE'S ALLEGATIONS IN AN APRIL 23 TALK WITH DEA SAIC'S WHO ARE HOLDING REGIONAL MEETING HERE. MINGOV HAS ALSO ORDERED FULL INVESTIGATION OF GAGE STORY AND, AS PART OF INVESTIGATION, MINISTRY'S SUBSECRETARY CALLED IN ADCM AND DEA REPS AFTERNOON APRIL 23 TO REQUEST BACKGROUND ON GAGE VISIT TO ECUADOR. SUBSECRETARY APPEARED SATISFIED WITH OUR EXPLANATIONS ALTHOUGH HE DID LINK APPEARANCE OF GAGE ARTICLE WITH RECENT ANONYMOUS ANTI-GOVERNMENT TRACTS BEING CIRCULATED BY REGIME'S CIVILIAN OPPONENTS. END SUMMARY.

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2. NEWS OF NICHOLAS GAGE APRIL 21 ARTICLE ON DRUG TRADE

FIRST REACHED ECUADOR IN FORM OF BRIEF ARTICLE APPEARING IN APRIL 21 EDITION OF QUITO'S AFTERNOON TABLOID, ULTIMAS NOTICIAS. ULTIMAS NOTICIAS' STORY FOCUSED ON PORTIONS OF GAGE PIECE DEALING WITH ECUADOR, ESPECIALLY HIS ALLEGATION THAT MINISTER OF GOVERNMENT, ADM POVEDA, HAD INTERFERED IN THE JUDICIAL PROCESS BY ORDERING THE EVIDENCE AGAINST A DRUG TRAFFICKER ALTERED SO THAT THE CHARGES AGAINST HIM WOULD HAVE TO BE DISMISSED. SUBSEQUENT LOCAL PRESS STORIES ON GAGE SERIES HAVE AVOIDED DETAILS OF ACCUSATIONS AGAINST MINGOV.

3. POVEDA REACTION WAS QUICK IN COMING. EVENING APRIL 21, ONE OF POVEDA'S ASSISTANTS CALLED AN EMBASSY CONTACT TO PROTEST ARTICLE AND ASK WHAT LIGHT WE COULD SHED ON SOURCE OF ALLEGATIONS. THIS CALL WAS FOLLOWED UP THE NEXT MORNING BY A SIMILAR REQUEST FROM ANOTHER OF POVEDA'S LIEUTENANTS TO USAID POLICE NARCOTICS ADVISOR. APRIL 23 LOCAL PRESS REPORTED THAT ADM POVEDA DENIED GAGE'S ALLEGATIONS ON APRIL 22 AND ORDERED A DETAILED INVESTIGATION OF HIS CHARGES. SAME LINE HAS BEEN ECHOED BY GOE SEC GEN FOR ADMINISTRATION, GEN CARLOS AGUIRRE, WHO ALSO TOLD CORRESPONDENTS AFTERNOON APRIL 22 THAT A MESSAGE HAD BEEN SENT TO THE NEW YORK TIMES PROTESTING THE SLANDEROUS INFORMATION. POVEDA REPEATED HIS DENIAL AT APRIL 23 PRESS CONFERENCE.

4. APPEARANCE OF GAGE STORY COINCIDED WITH APRIL 21-25 DEA REGIONAL SAIC CONFERENCE BEING HELD HERE. POVEDA CAME TO EMBASSY MORNING OF APRIL 23 TO ADDRESS THE GROUP AS SCHEDULED. RATHER THAN EVADING THE ISSUE, HE CAME RIGHT OUT AND REFERRED TO GAGE'S SPECIFIC ALLEGATIONS. HE DENIED THE CHARGES AND SAID IT WAS A SHAME THAT THE HONOR OF ECUADOR HAD BEEN ATTACKED BY THE FOREIGN PRESS. HE SAID HE WOULD NOT HAVE COME TO ADDRESS THE SAIC'S IF HIS MINISTRY WERE NOT AN HONORABLE AND MORAL INSTITUTION. POVEDA ADDED THAT IF THERE WERE NOT A STRONG DESIRE TO COOPERATE WITH THE UNITED STATES ON THIS SERIOUS SOURCE PROBLEM, HE COULD HAVE EASILY USED THE GAGE ARTICLE AS A PRETEXT FOR ENDING COLLABORATION. BUT, HE SAID, GOE WAS DETERMINED TO DO EVERYTHING IT COULD TO CONTINUE CLOSE

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COOPERATION WITH THE UNITED STATES ON DRUG MATTERS. POVEDA ACKNOWLEDGED THAT GOE LAW ENFORCEMENT INSTITUTIONS MAY NOT BE PERFECT AND THAT FROM TIME TO TIME THEY MAY MAKE MISTAKES BUT THE WILL AND MOTIVATION EXISTS TO DO A GOOD JOB. HE CLOSED HIS REMARKS BY EXPRESSING APPRECIATION AND RESPECT FOR THE WORK BEING CARRIED OUT BY DEA.

5. IN A SUBSEQUENT DEVELOPMENT, AFTERNOON APRIL 23 GOE

SUBSECRETARY OF GOVERNMENT, DR. CARLOS ESTRELLAS, SUMMONED DEA REPS TO HIS OFFICE. AGENTS WHITE AND KUYKENDALL, ACCOMPANIED BY ADCM MET WITH ESTRELLAS FOR APPROX ONE HOUR. ALSO ATTENDING ON GOE SIDE WERE COORDINATOR GENERAL OF MINGOV (COLONEL VACA) AND AMCIT "SOCIAL ADVISOR" TO MINGOV, GEORGE MEIER.

6. ESTRELLAS OPENED SESSION BY EXPRESSING CONCERN OVER GAGE ALLEGATIONS AND COMPLAINING THAT HE HAD GONE TO PRESS WITHOUT SEEKING TO VERIFY THEM. HE REFERRED TO THE CLOSE TIES BETWEEN HIS MINISTRY AND THE USG (NARCOTICS COLLABORATION, THE MINISTRY'S "BUY AMERICAN" POLICY, ETC.) AND PROFESSED AMAZEMENT THAT OUR FRIENDSHIP COULD RESULT IN UNFOUNDED PERSONAL ATTACKS ON THE MINISTER. HE WAS ESPECIALLY STRUCK BY THE FACT THAT GAGE SERIES SHOULD APPEAR AT JUST ABOUT THE SAME TIME CIVILIAN OPPONENTS OF THE REGIME WERE CIRCULATING ANONYMOUS ANTI-GOVERNMENT TRACTS. "WHO IS THIS GAGE" ESTRELLAS ASKED, "AND WHAT CAN YOU TELL US ABOUT HIS VISIT TO ECUADOR?"

7. ADCM EXPLAINED CIRCUMSTANCE OF GAGE VISIT TO ECUADOR AND FACT THAT, AS NYT CORRESPONDENT, HE HAD RECEIVED THE USUAL COURTESIES JUST AS WOULD HAVE ANY OTHER REPRESENTATIVE OF OUR MEDIA. ADCM REJECTED ANY RESPONSIBILITY FOR CONTENTS OF GAGE ARTICLE (EXCEPT THOSE WHERE ECUADOR DEA REPS WERE SPECIFICALLY QUOTED) AND REPEATEDLY POINTED OUT THAT, ALTHOUGH WE HAD SET UP SOME APPOINTMENTS FOR HIM, GAGE HAD BEEN HERE FOR AN ENTIRE WEEK AND WE SIMPLY COULD NOT KNOW ALL OF THE PERSONS HE HAD INTERVIEWED. ADCM ALSO ADVANCED PERSONAL OPINION THAT APPEARANCE OF GAGE ARTICLES AND ANTI-GOVERNMENT TRACTS WAS SHEER COINCIDENCE AND ANY EFFORT TO LINK THEM WAS ABSURE.

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8. MEETING ENDED CORDIALLY AND WITH AGREEMENT THAT WE WOULD PROVIDE ESTRELLAS WITH LIST OF ECUADOREAN CONTACTS TO WHOM WE HAD INTRODUCED GAGE. ESTRELLAS REMARKED THAT GOE SINCERELY WANTED TO COOPERATE WITH US ON NARCOTICS MATTERS AND HE HOPED THAT ANY PROBLEMS WE HAD WITH GOE EFFORTS WE WOULD BRING DIRECTLY TO MINISTRY, INCLUDING ANY REPORTS OF SUSPECTED CORRUPTION. WE AGREED, POINTING OUT THAT THIS IS WHAT WE HAD ALREADY DONE ON A NUMBER OF OCCASIONS IN THE PAST.

9. COMMENT: GAGE STORY HAS CLEARLY CAUSED A MAJOR UPROAR WITHIN MINISTRY OF GOVERNMENT AND HAS NO DOUBT ALSO EMBARRASSED POVEDA WITH HIS OTHER CABINET COLLEAGUES. POVEDA'S APPEARANCE BEFORE SAIC'S WAS IMPRESSIVE AND, ALTHOUGH GAGE STORY HAS WITHOUT QUESTION MEMENTARILY COOLED OUR RELATIONS

WITH THE MINISTRY, THERE HAS BEEN NO UNPLEASANTNESS OVER
MATTER THUS FAR. WE THINK THAT GAGE STORY MAY IN FACT
HAVE PROVIDED A USEFUL JOLT TO ECUADOREAN LAW ENFORCEMENT
AUTHORITIES; NONETHELESS, WE THINK THAT ONE OF THESE STORIES
IS ABOUT AS MUCH AS THE POLITICAL ATMOSPHERE HERE CAN BEAR.
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